Service Learning for Sustainability: Linking academic goals with community needs and active student learning

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Key Components of Service Learning
Elements of Academic Service Learning

What Is Service-Learning?

- It is a method of encouraging student learning and development through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in, and meets the needs of, a community.

- It involves an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, along with the community.

- It helps foster civic responsibility.

- It is integrated into, and enhances, the academic curriculum or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled.

- It provides structured time for students or participants to reflect on the service experience.

Source: “Learning by Doing: Students Take Greening to the Community,” Edition 3, United States EPA.
Active Participation

Encourages student learning and development through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in, and meets the needs of, a community.

Key concepts:
✓ “Encourage student learning”
✓ “Active participation”
✓ “Needs of community”
Teaching Course Objectives through Service Learning

Integrate SL into the academic curriculum
Example 1: Integrating SL into Academic Content

Example course objective:
Develop an understanding of how sustainability is built through local food production and distribution.

Example SL Activities
• Build local vegetable gardens
• Outreach to people in need of produce
• Take locally grown food to people in need
Example 2: Integrating SL into Academic Content

Example Course Objective:
Understand the use of recycled materials in building construction.

Example SL Activities
• Help build housing for low income families using recycled material (typically non-profit)
• Work with a builder who uses recycled materials in construction (typically for-profit)
Linking SL to Course Curriculum: Guided Reflection

SL requires structured time for students or participants to reflect on the service experience.
Example 1: Guided Reflection and Assessment

Course Objective:
Develop an understanding of how sustainability is built through local food production and distribution.

SL Activity:
Help local non-profit build gardens

Reflection/Assessment:
• Paper on how activity reduced carbon emissions in transportation of farm goods.
• Graded on integration of SL experience
• 25% of their final course grade
Example 2: Guided Reflection and Assessment

Course Objective:
Understand the use of recycled materials in building construction.

SL Activity:
Help build houses for low income families with recycled material.

Reflection/Assessment:
• Presentations and discussions with classmates on effectiveness of program
• Graded on integration of SL experience
• 25% of their final course grade
Link Service Learning to your Course Concepts and Goals

Service learning works well when:

• Active participation directly relates to course content

• Time for reflection is provided

• Students have a sense of accomplishment

Source: GambiaVermont International Service Learning and Intern Collaborative